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Current freshman orientation practices among U.S. colleges and universities are described and comments upon the degree of concurrence between these practices and an evolving philosophy of freshman orientation are made. Letters requesting copies of orientation programs were sent to a random sample of 160 colleges and universities, divided equally among eight specific categories. Responses were received from 135, of which 110 were usable. These 110 programs were analyzed: (1) to determine the procedures employed to orient new students to those institutions, and (2) in terms of the number of activities in each program classified as "informational," "social," "intellectual," and "mechanical." Comparisons were made among the categories of institutions to determine the significance of observed differences in frequencies of the various categories of activities scheduled on the orientation programs. More than 82% of activities (other than registration and testing) are either informational or social, while intellectual activities account for about 18% of the total number of activities. A summary list indicates differences between categories of institutions in the proportionate emphasis upon information, social, or intellectual activities in orientation. (Author/CJ)

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Freshman Orientation in the United States Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

The following report is a portion of a Master's thesis prepared by the author. It describes the freshman orientation procedures and activities (as scheduled on the orientation programs) of 110 institutions of higher learning in the United States. (The categories of institutions and response rate of the sample are presented in Table 2, following the body of the report.) In addition, a summary of the findings of the thesis and conclusions based upon those findings are presented.

Orientation Procedures

Despite reports of declining use of Freshman Week (Bookman, 1948; Ludeman, 1956; Kronovet, 1966), this orientation practice is exceedingly popular among U. S. colleges and universities. The most recent report in the extent of use of Freshman Week (Kronovet, 1966) stated that it was engaged in by only 59 per cent of the institutions surveyed (N=1, 378). The present study, however, has found the Freshman Week in use by 94.55 per cent of the sampled institutions. This difference in findings may result from both or either of two facts. One, in this study Freshman Week is considered to be a period of time at least two days in length that is set aside immediately prior to the beginning of fall term classes for testing, registration, conveying of information, and socializing. It may be that Kronovet's "Freshman Week" does not include the short two or three day programs. Too, Kronovet's study was conducted by questionnaire, and the results obtained depend upon the institution's own understanding of the term "Freshman Week." In this study, the term was defined by the writer and applied to any and all orientation procedures which fit the definition.

At any rate more than 90 per cent of the institutions studied in the present analysis schedule a Freshman Week for newly entering students. Freshman Weeks range from two to eleven days. The average "week" is about five days in length.

During the Freshman Week the new student engages in activities which include placement and/or psychological testing, registration procedures, various assemblies, small-group meetings, tours, dances, picnics, receptions, lectures, convocations, and discussions. The list of individual activities is rather lengthy, but there are several activities which are commonly engaged in during the course of freshman orientation.

In addition to Freshman Week, but much less frequently employed, some institutions offer a summer pre-college testing, counseling, and general orientation session for new students. In all, only fifteen of the institutions in the usable sample (13.46%) schedule this procedure. Kronovet (1966) reported that fewer than one per cent of her sample schedule the pre-college program. No explanation is offered for this discrepancy. Of the fifteen institutions which schedule the pre-college program, only three schedule it as the sole orientation procedure. Thus twelve institutions offer both the pre-college and the Freshman Week program.

According to projections and findings reported in the literature, the freshman course is becoming obsolete as an orientation procedure. This study's findings are in agreement with the literature. Only six (5.4%) of the institutions in the sample schedule a course for freshmen. Only two of this group rely entirely upon the course for orienting freshmen to the school. Kronovet found that slightly more (14.6%) of her sample offered the equivalent of the freshman course.

Freshman camps were listed as optional orientation offerings by seven (6.36%) of the institutions studied. One institution scheduled a freshman camp which was not specifically designated as an optional activity for new students.

Orientation Activities

A breakdown of orientation activities, exclusive of mechanical activities, indicates that 768 (41.47%) are informational, 756 (40.82%) are social, and 328

(17.71%) are intellectual in nature. Exactly 90 per cent of the institutions include registration and/or testing in the orientation program. A few other single activities are classified as "mechanical."

On the whole the institutions show a very slight preference for informational activities during orientation. Eight informational activities were scheduled on the programs of at least 15 per cent of the schools. (See Table 1). In order of descending popularity, they are: appointment with faculty adviser; welcome assembly; dormitory meeting; library orientation; separate meetings for men and women (usually with deans of men and woman); college or departmental meetings; general information assembly; and small group orientation meetings. When the actual frequencies of these eight informational activities are considered, 61.11 per cent of total number of informational activities is accounted for. Thus, considerable homogeneity exists among the informational activities of college and university orientation programs.

There is less homogeneity in the social activities of the orientation programs. Only five activities are scheduled by at least 25 per cent of the institutions under consideration. In order of most to least frequent, they are: dance or mixer; picnic; entertaining film; president's reception; campus tour. These five account for only 36.77 per cent of the total number of social activities scheduled on orientation programs. Other, less frequently used, social activities include pep rallies, activities fairs, organized recreation, student union open house, "hootenannies," social hours, dormitory parties, song fests, and various receptions, to cite only a few examples.

It is apparent that activities designed to be intellectually stimulating are rather infrequently scheduled by the colleges and universities on their orientation programs. Only two such activities, the convocation, and the religious service are scheduled by at least 25 per cent of the institutions. The convocation and the religious service constitute nearly one-third (32.32%) of the total number of

TABLE 1

ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES USED BY AT LEAST 25 PER CENT
OF U.S. INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING*

Informational			Social			Intellectual		
Activity	No. of Institutions	%	Activity	No. of Institutions	%	Activity	No. of Institutions	%
Appointment with Faculty Advisor	65	59.1%	Dance or Mixer	66	60.0	Convocation	49	44.6
Welcome Assembly	56	53.6	Picnic	46	41.8	Religious Service	36	32.7
Dormitory Meeting	50	45.5	Entertaining Film	38	34.6			
Library Orientation	48	43.6	President's Reception	36	32.7			
Men and Women Meeting Usually with Deans	37	33.6	Campus Tour	29	26.4			
College or Department Meeting	34	30.9						
Information Assembly	32	29.1						
Small Group Meeting	29	26.4						

*N-110

intellectual activities offered during orientation by the institutions studied. Other, less frequently used, intellectual activities include panel discussions, faculty lectures, book reviews and discussions, and debates. No other intellectually stimulating activity occurs with notable frequency.

Orientation of freshman to the U. S. college or university is typically handled by a series of activities within a period of time known as Freshman Week. A very small percentage of the institutions also use a summer pre-college program, and an even smaller percentage utilize the freshman course to induct freshman into institutions of higher learning.

When orientation activities are classified "informational," "social," "intellectual," or "mechanical," the emphasis of orientation programs can be studied. Nearly every institution engages in mechanical or registration procedural activities during its orientation program. Informational and social activites are scheduled with almost equal frequencies. But intellectual activities are scheduled to a noticeably lesser extent, contributing less than one-fifth of the total number of orientation activities, when mechanical activities are excluded from that total.

Summary and Conclusions

The study was designed to describe the current freshman orientation practices among U. S. colleges and universities and to comment upon the degree of concurrence between those practices and an evolving philosophy of freshman orientation. It was felt that there was less of an emphasis upon intellectually stimulating activities during orientation than the philosophy would deem desirable.

In an effort to determine what comprises the current practices in freshman orientation, letters requesting copies of orientation programs were sent to a random sample of 160 colleges and universities. These 160 institutions were divided equally among eight categories of colleges and universities. Responses were received from 135 of the selected institutions. For purposes of the study,

110 of these responses were treatable.

Freshman orientation programs of the 110 institutions were then analyzed to determine the procedures employed to orient new students to those institutions. The programs were further analyzed in terms of the number of activities in each program which were classified as "informational," "social," "intellectual," and "mechanical." Comparisons were made among the categories of institutions to determine the significance of observed differences in frequencies of informational, social, and intellectual activities scheduled on the orientation programs.

Summary of Findings

It appears that freshman orientation in the United States is handled largely by two procedures, the Freshman Week and the pre-college clinic. Of these two, the Freshman Week is by far the most prevalent procedure, being employed by 95 per cent of the institutions sampled. The pre-college clinic is used by only 13 per cent of the institutions, and is most popular among public-supported institutions.

When the activities of the orientation programs are classified (exclusive of registration and testing) slightly more than 82 per cent of them are either informational or social in nature. These two types of activities occur with almost equal frequencies. Intellectual activities account for only about 18 per cent of the total number of orientation activities.

There are, of course, exceptions to these general findings when individual categories of institutions are taken into consideration. Some categories differ from others in the proportionate emphasis upon information, social, or intellectual activities in orientation. Presented below is a summary list of the differences between categories which are significant.

(1) Large public-supported institutions offer proportionately fewer informational than social and intellectual activities when compared with all other categories of institutions combined.

(2) Large public-supported institutions offer proportionately more intellectual than informational and social activities when compared with small public-supported institutions.

(3) Medium size public-supported institutions offer significantly more informational and significantly fewer intellectual activities than do the other categories of institutions combined.

(4) Small public-supported institutions offer proportionately fewer intellectual than informational and social activities when compared with all other categories of institutions combined.

(5) Private institutions offer proportionately more intellectual than informational and social activities when compared with public-supported institutions.

(6) Private coeducational institutions offer proportionately more intellectual than social activities when compared with public-supported institutions.

(7) Private colleges for men and private colleges for women combined offer proportionately more intellectual than social and informational activities when compared with public-supported institutions.

(8) Coeducational sectarian institutions offer proportionately fewer social than informational and intellectual activities when compared with public-supported institutions.

(9) Coeducational sectarian institutions offer proportionately fewer intellectual than informational activities when compared with private colleges for men and private colleges for women combined.

(10) Private colleges for men offer proportionately more intellectual than informational and social activities when compared with all other categories of institutions combined.

(11) Private colleges for men offer proportionately more intellectual than social activities when compared with private colleges for women.

Relationship of Practices to Orientation Philosophy

While there are differences among categories of institutions in the extent to which it is true, it appears that, in general, freshman orientation in the United States is largely concerned with conveying information to the freshman and providing him with a socially pleasant introduction to college life. And, of course, the freshman will be registered for classes and tested during orientation. But, the findings do not suggest that the freshman's introduction to college life includes a substantial intellectual emphasis.

The findings do suggest that the new student will experience more of an intellectually-stimulating introduction to the college experience if he attends a private college for men than he will be attending another type of school. If he attends a private college, coeducational or otherwise, it is likely that he will be more thoroughly introduced to college intellectual life than if he attends a public institution. He will probably be exposed to the least number of intellectually stimulating activities during orientation if he attends the medium-size public-supported institution.

In any case, it seems that the freshman entering any United State's institution of higher learning will engage in many more informational and social activities than intellectual activities in his initial encounter with higher education. With regard to the emerging philosophy of orientation, it can be stated that there appears to be a disparity between the ideal and the actuality in freshman orientation. It seems that the philosophy is not being practiced to any noticeable extent by the majority of institutions and categories of institutions. The private college for men would seem to be the only type of school which differs from this general conclusion markedly.

The conclusion becomes all the more apparent when it is realized that two traditional orientation activities, the convocation and the religious service, account for about one-third of the total number of intellectual activities

engaged in by U. S. colleges and universities. In some cases these activities might not justifiably be called "intellectual," but they fit into no alternative classification. Also, these activities do not, it appears, represent conscious efforts to add a greater intellectual emphasis to orientation programs since they are traditional. Thus, the conscious effort to implement the philosophy of orientation, that would have orientation be an induction into college intellectual life, appears to be even less in evidence than the figures indicate.

TABLE 2

FINAL RESPONSE RATE OF SAMPLE*

Category of Institution	Total Response	%	Reply, no Material	%	Usable Responses	%	No Response	%	25% of earlier non-respondents
Large Public-Supported 9,500+	18	90.0	1	5.0	17	85.0	2	10.0	1
Medium Public-Supported 4,500-9,500	19	95.0	1	5.0	18	90.0	1	5.0	1
Small Public-Supported 4,500-	17	85.0	3	15.0	14	70.0	3	15.0	2
Coeducational Sectarian 3,000-	16	80.0	4	20.0	12	60.0	3[1]	15.0	1
Coeducational Independent 3,000-	20	100.0	5	25.0	15	75.0	0	0.0	1
Private Coeducational 3,000+	14	70.0	3	15.0	11	55.0	6	30.0	2
Private Men's	16	80.0	2	10.0	14	70.0	4	20.0	1
Private Women's	15	75.0	6	30.0	9	45.0	5	25.0	2
Total Response Rate	135	84.38	25	15.63	110	68.75	24[1]	15.00	11

*Sample N=160; number of institutions in each category =20

[1] One Institution misplaced in course of study